

Jeff Currier *global fly fishing*

Little Big Fish

By WILLY ZIMMER Casper Star-Tribune staff writer

No American had ever been in the position Jackson's Jeff Currier found himself recently at the 2003 World Fly Fishing Championships. After scoring well on four rivers in the Spanish Pyrenees, Currier was in third place -- tantalizingly close to becoming the first Team USA angler to medal at the annual gathering of the world's best anglers.

Currier's final beat, however, was the toughest of all. Lake Escarra, the competition's only



stillwater venue, had produced 20 Fario brown trout for the 115 anglers participating in the catch-and-release competition. The other Americans, including Wyoming anglers Jay Buchner and Sam Mavrakis, had come up empty netted using standard, lake tactics -- throwing a wooly bugger long then stripping it back.

To make matters worse, Currier's lake beat was being pounded by heavy rain when he arrived.

Team captain Ed Opler visited Currier as he was preparing to fish. The ever-helpful Opler was bearing equipment courtesy of head coach, Jack Dennis, anticipating Currier would be tying on a bugger.

"I've got Jack's rod for you so you can get long casts with a bugger," Opler offered.

Currier had other plans.

"Ed, believe it or not, I'm fishing dry flies. Nobody's caught a fish on the regular tactics, so I'm fishing a dry."

Opler was aghast. Currier's seemingly illogical decision, however, was actually the result of sound detective work.

"(Opler) looked at me like I was just out of my skull," said Currier. "But I had been kind of quizzing the English and Australian teams who had caught between them eight-of-the-20 fish that had come out of the lake. They weren't telling me anything but I was getting clues, and I was convinced they had fished dry flies to catch all their fish.

"So I put a PMX as my bottom dry fly and a thorax mahogany dun as my top dry fly and in the pouring rain just threw them out there 10 feet from shore, sat there and stared at them. ...

Then a miracle happened. A fish came up and ate the thorax, I hooked him and landed him. ... It was the most important nine-inch fish I've ever caught in my life."



Currier's diminutive trophy was critical because it was longer than the minimum 20 centimeters -- approximately 7.5 inches -- and averted a disastrous skunk. The fish scored, however, and when the day had ended, Currier had earned his coveted third-place medal, the highlight of a six-year career on Team USA. And with the help of a 20th-place finish by Idahoan Pete Erickson, the Americans had claimed eighth place -their best-ever placing.

The medal was hard won. Currier's previous river beats had been productive, partly because he was willing to pay a steep physical price. Rather than wading and casting upstream, he had spent most of his time fishing from a kneeling position. Promising spots had to be approached on hands and knees to elude the senses of the wary Farios, once again behavior learned from the competition.

"I never got higher than three feet off the ground fishing a real short line. I learned that from the French last year when I was in France (at the 2002 championships) fishing for a similar sub-species of brown trout," he said. "... I'm still feeling the effects."

Currier's contrary approach worked more than once on his final day. He also netted a trio of small fish on the Aragon River, a stream Currier said is constantly off color and "absolute hell" to fish.

Standard tactics once again called for Polish nymphing, a technique that involves "hitting the fish in the face." And once again, an unconventional approach paid off. Currier used a dry fly dropper, fished close to shore "anywhere there was a foot or more of water," and caught three fish that scored.

Currier said the philosophy of catching as many scoring fish as possible is another change in American strategy. Most U.S. anglers use tactics designed to catch trophy-size fish, a habit that doomed Team USA to poor finishes in prior competitions. The previous best finish was 12th in 2002.



But after Currier's success, Team USA is likely to continue adapting its methods so to catch more

measurable fish.

And Currier believes that ability to adapt may mean Team USA has more medals and trophies in its future.

"This was big-time making top-10 over in the worlds. We're pretty psyched," Currier said.

"We're learning more of the strategies, and rather than going out and trying to catch a couple of big fish, we're trying to rack up the numbers, which is how you win."